

12. Community (2Q 2009—Walking the Walk: The Christian Life)

Biblical material: Gen. 11:1–4, 12:1–3, 1 Cor. 12:12–27, Eph. 4:1–13, Rev. 22:1–6.

Quotes

- The faith in which I was brought up assured me that I was better than other people; I was *saved*, they were *damned*... Our hymns were loaded with arrogance—self-congratulation on how cozy we were with the Almighty and what a high opinion he had of us, what hell everybody else would catch come Judgment Day. *Robert Heinlein*
- A faith that cannot survive collision with the truth is not worth many regrets. *Arthur C. Clarke*
- The church should be a community of encouragement. *Fred Catherwood*
- Nothing will so avail to divide the church as love of power. *Chrysostom*
- We don't *go* to church; we *are* the church. *Ernest Southcott*

Questions

We use the term community in different ways. How do we see ourselves as a community? Why is it important for us to work and share together? What are the dangers? How is a community best governed? What of the will of the majority? What kind of community is God looking for? What are the essential qualities?

Bible discussion

Interestingly Genesis 11 is referenced—the community of the Tower of Babel. This exemplifies how *not* to operate as a community: dedicated to repulsing God and refusing what he says. However it is clear that much can be accomplished when people work together—for good or ill. The call of Abram (Genesis 12) is the founding of a different community, one that was meant to be dedicated to God (though often failed too). Paul uses the illustration of the different parts of the body working together to illustrate the church (1 Cor. 12:12-27), and extends this in Ephesians 4 to talk about the different gifts that work together in the church. The final picture is from Rev. 22 when the community of the redeemed enters into eternity, the people of God home with him.

Comment

When it comes to building, how long it takes to put up, brick upon brick, tile upon tile?—at least before these modern ideas of making houses out of boards! In the old days, some of the great cathedrals took centuries to build. Intricate craftsmanship, painstaking construction, time-consuming carving—all part of the slow process of making a building for God.

And to destroy? Just a second or two. Some carefully placed explosives, and the tower block comes tumbling down in a cloud of dust. Or a direct hit by a bomb, and a cathedral is destroyed.

When it comes to relationships, how long it takes to build up, to learn to trust, to love. How quickly we doubt, distrust, hate.

How long does it take for a tiny bundle of cells into a baby, and then from a baby into a mature adult? How long is this process of growth and development! And to destroy? In an instant. A bullet. A knife. A suicide bomber who comes with flowers...

To build is always harder than to destroy.

As a community we need to build. Not to destroy. It's so easy to destroy. It takes no real thought. It takes no love, or caring, or sharing. Just a few words, and you can knife your friend in the back. A casual statement, and you can undermine someone's faith. And in traveling this route, we simply follow the way of the great Destroyer, the Devil himself.

God wants to make, create, build. All the Devil wants is to destroy.

Have you ever watched children playing? Like with the building bricks. One takes a long time to carefully construct a high tower. Then the other one comes crashing in, and knocks the tower to pieces. And how the tears flow from the building creator!!

We are called by God to "build up the body of Christ." That is our commission. But oh so often we do the opposite.

Our role as a community is to focus on Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, and see what we can learn from him. See how he deals with the antagonistic destroyers, the cruel crucifiers, the rejecting followers of Satan. Us! And most of all see how he reveals the truth about the Father, the head of our community...

Ellen White Comments

The Saviour has given His precious life in order to establish a church capable of ministering to the suffering, the sorrowful, and the tempted. A company of believers may be poor, uneducated, and unknown; yet in Christ they may do a work in the home, in the community, and even in "the regions beyond," whose results shall be as far-reaching as eternity. {MH 106}

Christ is present in every assembly of the church. He is acquainted with everyone connected with His service. He knows those whose hearts He can fill with the holy oil, that they may impart it to others. Those who faithfully carry forward the work of Christ in our world, representing in word and works the character of God, fulfilling the Lord's purpose for them, are in His sight very precious. Christ takes pleasure in them as a man takes pleasure in a well-kept garden and the fragrance of the flowers he has planted. {AG 95}

In order to manifest the character of God, in order that we may not deceive ourselves, the church, and the world by a counterfeit Christianity, we must become personally acquainted with God. If we have fellowship with God, we are His ministers, though we may never preach to a congregation. We are workers together with God in presenting the perfection of His character in humanity. {6T 13}

Through trials and persecution, the glory--character--of God is revealed in His chosen ones. The church of God, hated and persecuted by the world, are educated and disciplined in the school of Christ. They walk in narrow paths on earth; they are purified in the furnace of affliction. They follow Christ through sore conflicts; they endure self-denial and experience bitter disappointments; but their painful experience teaches them the guilt and woe of sin, and they look upon it with abhorrence. Being partakers of Christ's sufferings, they are destined to be partakers of His glory. {MB 31}